

Soviets take Lithuanian government building

VILNIUS, U.S.S.R (AP) — Soviet troops took over the building housing the Lithuanian chief prosecutor's office late Friday after staff members refused to work with a Moscow loyalist named as new chief prosecutor by the Kremlin.

The takeover was the first occupation of a government building in Vilnius since Lithuania declared its independence on March 11, and came as an abrupt reversal by the Soviets after initial steps by both sides toward a compromise.

Soldiers previously had occupied a few Communist Party buildings.

Uniformed men early Saturday also moved into Lithuania's central newspaper printing plant. They refused to identify themselves and said only that they were protecting the building. Witnesses said they saw at least seven men, armed with nightsticks.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis said on television the decision to take over the prosecutor's office "brings shame on the Soviet Union."

"They are trying to destroy the legal system. We have had these challenges before. We have stood against them, and we will do it again," he said.

Premier Kazimiera Prunskiene told reporters after an emergency session of the Presidium of the Lithuania parliament that the government told employees of the prosecutor's office to try to work in the building under the Lithuanian official rather than Moscow's choice.

Lithuanian legislator Egidius Bickauskas said earlier on TV that the Soviet troops occupied the building with the help of an employee. He did not elaborate.

A foreign journalist rushed to the scene and said he saw a truckload of Interior Ministry soldiers enter the building.

Moscow earlier tried to force Lithuania to adhere to Soviet law by firing Lithuania's chief prosecutor, Arturis Paulauskas, and announcing he would be replaced by Antanas Petrauskas. The chief prosecutor is basically a republic-wide district attorney.

Soviet deputy prosecutor Alexei Vasiliev made the announcement in a conference hall of the prosecutor's building in Vilnius. He ordered the 100 staff members to enforce Soviet law.

Staffers began arguing and shouting at Vasiliev and then walked out.

Hours later, the Soviet soldiers moved in.

A duty officer at the Lithuanian Interior Ministry said soldiers also had arrived at a Communist Party building, the Institute of Party History.

Other buildings under military
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control are the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, the Higher Party School and Communist Party headquarters. All are Communist Party buildings.

Deputy Premier Kazimieras Motieka, speaking to reporters, accused Vasiliev of bargaining in bad faith when he met with Lithuanian officials earlier. Motieka attended that meeting.

Vasiliev spoke politely of compromise with the Lithuanians when "there's no question at that moment they already had this planned," Motieka charged.

He said soldiers told Lithuanian Interior Minister Marijonas Misiukonis they were "taking it (the building) over to enforce security at the request of Vasiliev."

In other developments Friday:

- Byelorussia, the republic just south of Lithuania, demanded the return of territory given to Lithuania when the republic was forcibly annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.

- The KGB said it would enforce Soviet law in Lithuania and protect Lithuanian citizens who cooperate with it.

- The Council of the Federation, a new body of leaders in President Mikhail S. Gorbachev's government, directed Gorbachev to tell Lithuania that before any talks on secession begin, the republic

must rescind laws contradicting the Soviet Constitution.

The White House said President Bush sent a letter to Gorbachev emphasizing U.S. hopes the conflict could be resolved peacefully. Bush said the letter assured Gorbachev "we're not trying to make things difficult" for either side.

The United States has repeatedly voiced support for Lithuania's right to self-determination.

At the same time, the United States — like other Western nations — does not want the dispute to lead to the removal of Gorbachev, whose reforms have paved the way for democratic governments across Eastern Europe.

Byelorussia, known for its conservative leadership, said Lithuania was given "historically Byelorussian territory" in a half-dozen border regions when Soviet officials incorporated Lithuania and set its borders 50 years ago.

If Lithuania secedes, "we will be forced to insist on the return to the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist republic of Byelorussian land," said the statement.

The Estonian parliament did not set a date for full independence from Moscow.

The Defense Ministry on Thursday said it would not punish the hundreds of Lithuanian deserters if they voluntarily returned to their units.